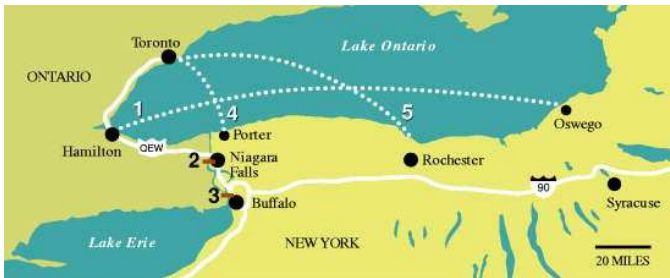


# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## FOCUS: BORDER CROSSINGS Truckers still waiting for relief

In the past five years, five proposals have been made to ease congestion at the international bridges. Two are being actively pursued; the others are dead or years away.

By BILL MICHELMORE  
NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU  
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### Truck traffic alternatives

Several ideas have been pitched during the last five years to ease truck traffic on the Peace Bridge and the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge. Among them:

#### 1. Hamilton - Oswego truck ferry

Proposed ferry across Lake Ontario would transport 150 prescreened truck trailers a day and could be up and running in a year.

#### 2. Niagara Falls truck bridge

A \$230 million plan to convert an unused rail bridge next to the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge could be operating in three years.

#### 3. Buffalo truck bridge

A \$285 million, privately funded bridge about a mile north of the Peace Bridge. The span is said to be years away.

#### 4. Toronto - Porter truck ferry

Several proposals for 800 acres of lakeshore land in Porter in northern Niagara County include a possible truck ferry across Lake Ontario.

#### 5. Rochester fast ferry

The ship was intended to carry trucks across Lake Ontario from Toronto. Regulatory hurdles contributed to financial troubles, and the ferry closed early.

NIAGARA FALLS - Proposals come and go, but trucks keep rolling, often slowly, over the only two Western New York crossings available to them.

Five proposals for truck crossings between New York State and Ontario - three by ferry and two over bridges - have been pitched during the last five years to reduce commercial backups on the two Niagara River bridges.

Two appear dead, one is said to be years away, and two are being actively pursued: one using a bridge and the other a ferry.

On the bridge front, a U.S.-Canada company is working toward buying and refurbishing an unused railroad bridge across the Niagara River, next to the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge in Niagara Falls, and using it exclusively for commercial traffic.

On the waterfront, the latest plan is for a truck-container ferry across Lake Ontario between Hamilton, Ont., and Oswego, in central New York.



Derek Gee/Buffalo News Truck traffic is often backed up on the Peace Bridge, which carried 1.3 million trucks last year.

The biggest beneficiary would be those who use the Peace Bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie, the third-busiest crossing along the 3,000-mile U.S.-Canadian border.

The Peace Bridge carried 1.3 million trucks last year.

Also in the works is a \$285 million privately funded project to convert the international railway span a mile north of the Peace Bridge into a trucks-only crossing.

The Ambassador Niagara Signature Bridge Group says it is confident that project will happen, although company officials still have to meet with authorities on both sides of the border. Property has been purchased and there has been some demolition, but critics say this particular truck span is years away.

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Next in line to benefit from a special truck crossing would be the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, which handles the fourth-largest volume of commercial traffic along the border. A little more than 1 million trucks used the span last year.

No trucks are allowed on the Whirlpool Rapids and Rainbow bridges in Niagara Falls.

The Oswego-Hamilton cargo ferry plan is being enthusiastically pushed by the heads of the port authorities in both cities.

"The Port of Oswego gets 150 ship visits a year, mostly from Canada," said Thomas H. McAuslan, the port authority's executive director. "I'm sure this proposal will happen. It's just a matter of time."

The ferry would transport truck trailers only. Ontario-bound trucks from the United States, for example, would drive to the Oswego port, where the trailers would be loaded onto the cargo ferry. The American truck driver would then hitch up an incoming load from Canada, or "bobtail" it home without a trailer.

Two ships, each capable of carrying 150 prescreened cargo trailers, would make the 146-mile crossing overnight.

"We have the money and we're pushing ahead with this," said J. Keith Robson, president of the Hamilton Port Authority. "We still have to deal with border crossing and security issues, but the plan is looking increasingly likely."

Robson said the capital investment is relatively small: between \$6 million and \$10 million from each port authority, which includes construction of Customs and Homeland Security facilities. Revenue from the shipping fees would cover the operating costs, he said. If all goes as planned, he said the ferry could be up and running by next summer.

Canada's largest shipping fleet on the Great Lakes, Seaway Marine Transport of St. Catharines, Ont., has urged both port authorities to seriously consider the plan.

Buffalo trucking boss Mark Oehm said it's a good idea, but only for certain types of goods.

"It would work for non-urgent cargo, such as construction equipment," said Oehm, who owns American Freight Transport in Cheektowaga. "It wouldn't work for hotshot loads from Buffalo to Toronto, where time is of the essence."

Other trucking company heads have concerns about the economics and practicality of a Hamilton-Oswego ferry, particularly the eight- to 12-hour length of the journey.

"You might gain something on Customs clearance, but you would lose it on transit time," said Enno Jakobson, vice president of risk management at Challenger Motor Freight in Cambridge, Ont., which does 60 percent of its business in the United States. "I think it has very limited application."

Another factor worrying truckers is that, since the ships would carry cargo trailers only, trucking companies on both sides of the border would have to partner with their international counterparts to deliver the goods. This could add to the overall costs, said Paul Dean, vice president of Kriska Transportation of Prescott, Ont., which does 50 percent of its business in the United States.

Meanwhile, the heads of both bridge authorities said ongoing renovations and expansions at the bridges will offset the need for additional truck crossings.

Toll booths on the Peace Bridge are currently being relocated to the Canadian side, opening the way for three truck lanes by moving existing car lanes to the booth area, said Ronald Rienas, general manager of the Peace Bridge Authority.

An environmental report on the new Peace Bridge span will be completed next year, paving the way for the

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# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## FOCUS: BORDER CROSSINGS **Truckers still waiting for relief**

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bridge authority to expand its traffic capacity by up to four lanes, doubling the number of existing lanes and relieving future truck backups, Rienas said.

"Unlike the other proposals, this plan will be ready to go by early summer of 2005," he said. "Our plan is way ahead of the others that are out there."

The Lewiston-Queenston Bridge is currently being reconstructed to provide a new lane for prescreened commercial traffic enrolled in the new Free And Secure Trade program.

"A fifth lane on the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge will make this one of the most efficient border crossings between the United States and Canada," said Thomas E. Garlock, general manager of the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission.

Construction of the Highway 405 approach to the bridge on the Ontario side is scheduled to be completed this year, and construction of a fifth lane by November 2005.

In the new Niagara Falls bridge proposal, cargo trucks would cross the border on the abandoned railway bridge adjacent to the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge. Two companies are in the process of buying the Niagara River Bridge from the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railways.

"Our bridge could take all the current truck traffic at the Peace Bridge and the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge and still have a third of its capacity left," said William H. Truesdale Jr., a former Buffalo region director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Truesdale is president of Niagara River Truck Bridge, a private corporation at work with a sister company in Niagara Falls, Ont., on the \$230 million U.S. project to turn the old Michigan Central Railroad Bridge into a four-lane crossing for trucks.

After the Niagara River Bridge purchase, it would take 18 months to refurbish and widen the bridge to accommodate four lanes of truck traffic and build

Customs facilities. The new bridge could open in three years, Truesdale said.

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